

Message Text

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42

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 CU-02 OPR-02 SY-05 ACDA-05

OMB-01 /083 W

----- 029820

R 030950Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9669

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1453

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BM

SUBJECT: CONTINUING LABOR UNREST

REF: RANGOON 1356

1. AS THE JUNE 6 ANNIVERSARY OF LAST YEAR'S VIOLENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND LABOR APPROACHES, SOME LABOR UNREST CONTINUES AND RUMORS CIRCULATE INCREASINGLY ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR RENEWED VIOLENCE. SLOW DOWN TACTICS AT THE JUTE MILL, THE THAM-AING TEXTILE PLANT AND THE INSEIN RAILWAY REPAIR SHOP REPORTED REFTEL ARE STILL UNDER WAY AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS UNREST MAY HAVE SPREAD TO THE SINMALAIK DOCKYARDS. APPARENTLY TO SHOW THAT THE GUB WILL NOT PERMIT THE LOW KEY PROTESTS TO GET OUT OF HAND, TROOPS AND AN ARMORED VEHICLE WERE ALLEGEDLY SENT TO THE JUTE MILL JUNE 2 (AN ARMY UNIT IS BIVOUACED NEARBY) AND THE DOCKYARDS IN A SHOW OF FORCE. NO ARRESTS WERE REPORTED. RUMORS ALLEGE THAT A GENERAL STRIKE MAY BE IN THE OFFING, INCLUDING POLICE PERSONNEL DISGRUNTLED ABOUT THE ARMY'S SUPERIOR BENEFITS, BUT MUCH OF THIS MAY BE WISHFUL THINKING ON THE PART OF THE REGIME'S OPPONENTS. THE GUB HOWEVER, IS AT LEAST SOMEWHAT CONCERNED OVER THE POTENTIAL FOR TROUBLE. PARTY AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS ARE

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REPORTEDLY MEETING JUNE 3 AT BSPP HEADQUARTERS TO DISCUSS THE

SITUATION. PRESS EDITORIALS IN RECENT DAYS HAVE HARPED ON THE NEED TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF "IRRESPONSIBLE AND DISCIPLINED WORKERS." FOR WHATEVER ITS WORTH, TWO ARTILLERY PIECES WERE SEEN BEING TOWED INTO CENTRAL RANGOON JUNE 3.

2. ANOTHER THEME FREQUENTLY HEARD IS A POSSIBLE ALLIANCE BETWEEN PROTESTING WORKERS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOW RETURNED TO THE RASU CAMPUS. THE CAMPUS APPEARS CALM HOWEVER, AND IT WOULD SEEM UNLIKELY THAT ANY ATTEMPTS TO COORDINATE PLANS FOR JOINT PROTEST WOULD GO UNNOTICED BY GUB INTELLIGENCE. NONETHELESS, THE STUDENT BODY REMAINS BITTER ABOUT LAST DECEMBER'S EVENTS AND MIGHT SHOW AT LEAST SYMBOLIC SOLIDARITY WITH LABOR SHOULD VIOLENCE

OCCUR.

3. A SOURCE WHO HAS REPORTED RELIABLY IN THE PAST WAS PRESENT AT A SOCIAL GATHERING OF MIDDLE-GRADE ARMY OFFICERS EVENING OF JUNE 2 WHERE CURRENT UNEASINESS WAS DISCUSSED. THE OFFICERS CITED THE SAD STATE OF THE ECONOMY AS THE BASIS FOR THIS WEEK'S SPATE OF RUMORS AND SPECULATED ABOUT ONE, APPARENTLY EMANATING FROM THE CIVILIAN SECTOR, THAT JUNE 6 MIGHT MARK A COUP AGAINST THE NE WIN REGIME. MOST ASSERTED THAT "GENERAL TIN OO WOULDN'T LET IT HAPPEN" ALTHOUGH AT LEAST ONE OFFICER QUESTIONED THAT ASSUMPTION. ALL AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT NE WIN HAD TO BE PROTECTED. THEY EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT BSPP CADRE AND PEOPLE'S COUNCIL'S OFFICIALS COULD DEFUSE THE SITUATION ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT APPEAR RELUCTANT TO USE THE ARMY TO QUELL DISORDERS SHOULD THEY OCCUR.

4. COMMENT: CRITICAL TO THE CURRENT SITUATION MAY BE THE GUB'S DELIBERATIONS ON TACTICS. THE RUMOR MILL, UNLIKE MOST BURMESE INDUSTRIES, MAY BE WORKING OVERTIME, BUT ORGANIZED UNREST IS BY NO MEANS THAT WIDESPREAD IN RANGOON. IT COULD INCREASE IF HEAVY-HANDED TACTICS PROVOKE VIOLENCE ALTHOUGH EVEN IN THIS CONTINGENCY THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE MILITARY, WHICH STILL ADMINISTERS RANGOON, COULD CONTROL THE SITUATION.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, LABOR DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975RANGOO01453
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750193-0635
From: RANGOON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750686/aaaadanz.tel
Line Count: 97
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 RANGOON 1356
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <13 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONTINUING LABOR UNREST
TAGS: PINT, BM
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006